

# Roy and Mary Reeves: *In Love With Their Land*

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Photo by Coleen Vansant

**I**t takes someone special to be a TREASURE Forest owner. They seem to stay a little longer, work a little harder, and love a little more than anyone else – these are the qualities that place them in the elite group they are in. These are the qualities of Roy and Mary Reeves of Randolph County.

“Most people that have land – they love it!” says Roy. Both he and his wife Mary have a passion for their farm and a tremendous sense of pride in the decades of sweat they have put into the improvements on their land. All one has to do to know this, is talk to them about their farm.

Both Roy and Mary were born and raised in South Alabama, coming to Randolph County in 1968 when Roy got the position as president of a local bank. In 1968 they purchased their first land

and began to actively manage 220 acres. They say when they first acquired the land it had been cut over, so their task at hand was to reclaim it by replanting. This was the beginning of their love affair with the farm. Since then, they have added to their property holdings bringing the total acres to 355.

## **Turning Disaster into a TREASURE**

Although they had been good stewards of their land for many years, the couple says they did not begin intense management under the TREASURE Forest concept until 1996. When Hurricane Opal raged through the state the year before, the couple had around 70 acres of timber that was 90% damaged. After salvaging what they could, they were interested in replanting. They were introduced to the

TREASURE Forest program when Alabama Forestry Commission personnel serviced a cost share referral. Roy began going to the Randolph County Forestry Planning Committee meetings where he learned more about TREASURE Forest, along with meeting other landowners that were participating in the program.

“When Opal hit, things changed,” Roy says. “I was doing things in a small way, but had to change and do things in a big way.”

Roy and Mary have three management objectives on their land. The first is timber, the second is wildlife, and the third is aesthetics. The timber on their property is very diverse; they have everything from three-year-old cherry bark oak and sawtooth oak, to mature timber that was part of their first reforestation effort in 1968. Although much of the property is in vari-



ous ages of longleaf and loblolly plantations, Roy says he has 20 acres of mixed even-age timber. He is managing both to see what the pros and cons are for each and determine “which is the best way to go.” The mature pine has been thinned three times.

Roy is currently working to prune his young pine. His goal is to try to get to a 24-foot height. He has done all of the work himself with the help of his grandson Luke. The couple also takes advantage of prescribed burning on the property, and they are currently on a three-year burning rotation in their pine plantations.

They finally got over the impact of Opal, only to be plagued with two natural disasters this winter. A tornado crossed the farm and damaged 25–30 acres of timber, including some large hardwoods in one of the streamside management zones. Also, the ice storm this year damaged many of the young longleaf.

## Taking Care of the Farm’s Natural Resources

The Reeves say that when they first purchased the property, there were very few quail and no turkey. Now, after managing intensively they have abundant wildlife. Roy tells of seeing 3 gobblers and 18 hens at one time. A natural gas pipeline cuts through their property and Roy uses this for food plots. He keeps the grass bush hogged, but not all at one time to allow cover for the animals and birds. They have summer food plots with things such as corn, soybeans, peas, grain

sorghum, and sunflowers, as well as winter plots with tasty things such as turnips, wheat, and clover. There is a young orchard of fruit trees including pear, peach, and plum. Cherry bark oak, sawtooth oak, and chestnut have been planted to provide mast during the winter. They say it is very hard to come to the farm now and not see deer, turkey, and quail. Family and close friends hunt on the property.

The prescribed burning and bush hogging helps with the aesthetic quality of the land, and the couple has planted flowers to make it more attractive.

Water quality is very important to the Reeves and they have taken extra measures to ensure that the integrity of the water flowing through their land is preserved. They have around 25 water bars along their roads, plus fire lanes to divert water from the roadways and to prevent erosion. “It’s rough to drive, but you have to protect the soil,” Roy says. “We try to keep the roads in good shape.” In addition, grasses and other plants are also planted in high erosion areas to keep the soil from washing away.

Photo by Coleen Vansant



*Diversity of the forest is evident on the Reeves Farm.*

They also work hard on their stream crossings to make sure that they are stable. Mary herself laid brick on the ground at one stream crossing to make a secure path for vehicles to cross the water.

## Education on the Farm

Using their farm as an educational tool is very important to the Reeves. Over the years, hundreds of people – from school children and boy scouts, to landowners on a farm tour – have visited the property.

For several years Reeves Farm has been the host of “Classroom in the Forest/Forest in the Classroom” where fifth grade students from the local school come to learn about forest management and good stewardship. The children visit different stations including tree identification, fire and prescribed burning, forest management, water quality, and hunting safety. A beautiful nature trail has been built by the couple that includes trees of different species marked with signs. Foot bridges have been constructed so that the



Photo by Coleen Vansant

*A Fathers Day gift that took three months to find.*

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children can go from one side of the stream to the other with ease.

Hundreds of boy scouts have visited the farm over the years to camp, learn about nature, and work on their skills. At one time the Reeves place was referred to as the Boy Scout farm. The couple hosts the annual county forestry judging competition and several forestry tours have been held there.

Roy and Mary both agree that educating children is very important. By visiting their farm and learning about good and responsible stewardship, they are hoping that the children will know that it is not bad to cut a tree and the experience will hopefully teach them to be better stewards of the land.

The forest and wildlife management practices also support one of Roy's hobbies – bee keeping. He currently has 20 hives that provide 10-12 gallons of honey each.

Over the past few years Roy has distinguished himself as a leader in the area

Photo by Coleen Vansant



*A natural gas pipeline cuts through the property dividing a mature stand and a younger plantation. The open area is planted with seasonal wildlife foods.*

forestry circle. In addition to being a former president of the local Forestry Planning Committee, he is currently serving as president of the county Alabama TREASURE Forest Association (ATFA) chapter. Roy also serves as the Northeast Regional Coordinator for ATFA.

One of the things that Roy is the proudest of is the fact that he has done most of the work on the farm himself. He has had two heart bypass surgeries and is on his second pacemaker. "This place has helped me to live longer," he declares. "It's been therapeutic and given me a better quality of life. When I'm working, I'm happy."

### **A Family Affair**

As you travel over the Reeves property you have many opportunities to see that they share it all with the family. Every road and interesting stop on the farm is named for a

daughter, son-in-law, or grandchild. Aside from Reeves Road and Mary's Ford there are interesting places like Leigh's Loop, Seth's Overlook, and Kem's Cutoff.

Roy likes to tell a funny story on himself regarding a couple of signs on his property. Several years ago one of his daughters and grandson gave him a special Fathers Day present. All he was told was that it was green and white, somewhere on the farm, and that he would have to look for it. After three months and a lot of searching, he finally found his gift – two signs that read, "Longleaf Pines Planted by Roy Reeves (Grand-daddy) 2000-2001."

The couple has passed on to their children and grandchildren their stewardship ethic and love for the land. Mary and Roy explain that at first, their two daughters did not care that much about the land. But over the years, Roy and Mary's enthusiasm and passion for their farm has rubbed off. Both daughters and their families are now TREASURE Forest owners. "We work to encourage them and teach them. I think they will carry on what they have started," Roy explains. He adds that they have promised that his and Mary's property would be the "Reeves Farm" for a long time.

"We hope in the future that our children and grandchildren will carry on what has been started here," Mary says. "Maybe they don't love it as much as we do, but they will learn to as they get older." 🌿

*This young plum tree is just one of hundreds of fruit and nut trees that have been planted on the property.*

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